

PLANNING DIVISION

Planning Division staff includes Planning and Economic Development Manager Jay Szklut and Planning Coordinator Jeffrey Wheeler. The Planning Division has many responsibilities which include but are not limited to responding to public requests for assistance on all land-use related questions, reviewing development proposals and plans, drafting reports, grant applications, and Request For Proposals (RFP's), representing the town at various local and regional events, acting as liaisons to other departments and committees, working with selected consultants and being available to respond to any other planning/zoning related issues. In addition, the Planning division staffs the Town's Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals, schedules board and committee meetings, drafts zoning amendments, schedules public hearings, and administers Special Permit and Variance applications. Some highlights and accomplishments from 2006 follow.

A major accomplishment was the passage of the Cushing Square Overlay Zone sponsored by the Planning Board and the outcome of a recommendation of the Belmont Economic Development Plan (the "Corridor Study"). Planners were instrumental in bringing this amendment to Town Meeting and subsequent approval. A Consultant was hired to assist staff by drafting initial language, gathering data, meeting with residents and business owners and generally providing administrative and management support. A local architect was also hired to provide architectural renderings of the Square as it might develop under the new zoning. The amendment provides incentives to business and property owners in the Square to invest in their properties promoting economic revitalization of the area. Other activities implementing the recommendations within the Corridor Study included preparation of a zoning amendment eliminating so-called "split-zoned lots", developing zoning recommendations for "transitional zones", and providing recommendations on the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street transportation improvements proposed for the Cushing Square intersection.

Planners also worked diligently on the review of a Chapter 40B application for the construction of 299 apartments at the Belmont Uplands site. An RFP was written to solicit consultant help for review of proposed storm water, waste water, traffic and environmental impacts. Staff also scheduled and attended all meetings, acted as a resource for the public, received and distributed all correspondence and reports.

Staff planners also issued an RFP for the development of Affordable Housing at Zone 6 of the former McLean property. Staff worked with the Belmont Housing Trust to develop the RFP and assisted in the review of proposals. Planners then worked with the selected developer preparing funding proposals. Staff also assisted the Developer and the Planning Board during the Site Plan Review process. The project called Waverley Woods proposes the development of 40 units of affordable housing on the site and was approved by the Planning Board in November 2006. During review of the project proposal staff identified a possible discrepancy in the adopted zoning language (Sec. 6.9 of the Zoning By-Law) over what was intended. Staff worked with the Planning Board and Town Counsel and presented a correct zoning amendment to Town Meeting for adoption.

Staff Planners continued to work with the Belmont Center Planning Group (BCPG) preparing recommendations for the future of the Center. Staff coordinated a one day planning Charrette on behalf of BCPG and assisted in the review of the proposals for the redevelopment of the Belmont Center Fire Station. Planners also met with residents of the Our Lady of Mercy Church neighborhood (the Oakley Neighborhood Association) and investigated the possibility of establishing a Smart Growth Overlay Zone (M.G.L. Chapter 40R) on the site to guide future redevelopment. Planners also began the process of updating the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan. Working with representatives from the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission an update request was submitted to all Town Boards. Staff planners also updated the plan to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data and the redevelopment of the McLean property.

Planners also drafted zoning amendments modifying requirements for free-standing signs, fences installed on the side boundaries of properties, and demolition of historic accessory structures. This last proposed amendment did not pass at Town Meeting and will be revised and resubmitted in the future. Staff worked with a citizen and Town Counsel to re-write a citizens petition to allow an additional use at his property. After dismissing the amendment at the 2006 Annual Town Meeting, staff worked with proponent to draft an amendment that would accomplish his objective. A zoning amendment was presented and passed at the 2006 Special Town Meeting.

Planners continued to provide staff support and attend most every meeting of the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Belmont Vision 21 Implementation Committee and the Belmont Center Planning Group. The Planning Coordinator continued to administer money for affordable housing through the Newton HOME Consortium. This is a federally funded, regional, affordable housing program where the Town receives approximately \$100,000 each year. Currently, the money is being used for the Waverley Woods development. The Planning and Economic Development Manager attends monthly meetings on the McLean Construction Coordination and Implementation Agreement Committee. The first Townhouses were completed and sold during 2006. The Assisted Living Facility also began

activity with the opening of a sales office. The plans for Olmsted Drive were reviewed and minor modifications approved by the Planning Board. Construction of the "road" began in late summer.

Planners received many accolades for its web page throughout the year. The site is often used as a model for other departments as it is up-to-date, well organized and comprehensive. The Planning Coordinator was responsible for the improvements and will continue this effort through 2007. The site includes information on all projects and issues currently within the purview of the Office of Community Development (OCD).

The Planning Division commits to providing a high level of service to the public in 2007. The Division is located within the Office of Community Development located on the 2nd floor of the Homer Municipal Building. Office hours remain Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Ms. Jeannine Rogan can be contacted during regular business hours to set up appointments. Residents are also urged to visit the OCD web page at www.town.belmont.ma.us for current information on active projects. Comments or questions are also welcome electronically at jszklut@town.belmont.ma.us and/or jwheeler@town.belmont.ma.us.

Respectfully submitted,
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